



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

Subsidizing Sweatshops II

Factsheet -- Federal Government

April 15, 2009-- *Subsidizing Sweatshops II* tracks developments in four factories covered in the *Subsidizing Sweatshops I* (July 2008) and adds four additional factory case studies. These eight factories are located in China, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and United States and produce for nine major uniform brands – Armor Holdings / BAE, Cintas Corporation, Eagle Industries, Elbeco, Fechheimer Brothers Company, Lion Apparel, Propper International, Rocky Brands, and Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing.

Subsidizing Sweatshops II documents severe violations of labor law and human rights in nearly all factories investigated. In light of these findings, SweatFree Communities asks companies to improve conditions in the facilities and assess the impact of their prices, delivery schedules, and supply chain relationships on factories' ability to comply with codes of conduct and labor rights standards. In addition, SweatFree Communities urges governments to maintain contracts with companies working to remedy violations and to join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium.

Below are summaries of labor conditions documented in the report that pertain to factories producing for brands that supply the federal government. The full report, including quotes from workers and detailed recommendations for each case, is available at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing.

Brand: Eagle Industries (subsidiary of Alliant Techsystems, Inc.)

Factory investigated: Eagle (New Bedford, Massachusetts)

Contracts: In 2008, the Army and Navy had a total of \$5.4 million in contracts with Eagle Industries for personal armor and individual equipment produced at this facility in Massachusetts and at a facility in Missouri. Source: <http://www.usaspending.gov>

- **Serious health and safety issues**, include smoke and foul smells causing blurry vision and respiration problems; forklifts operated by untrained drivers dangerously close to work stations; suffocating heat in summer causing workers to faint.
- **Intimidation, discrimination of union supporters.** “They are always watching you.”
- **Pressure to limit bathroom visits.** “They are always watching you, how many times you go to the bathroom, measuring everyone’s time, making us nervous.”

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- **Workers are not allowed to talk at work stations.** “If you speak with the person next to you, they give you a warning.”
- **No paid sick leave. No affordable health insurance.**

The federal government also sources from the following brands, although reports sourcing from U.S.-based facilities, rather than from these international facilities that we investigated.

Brands: Lion Apparel (\$1.08 million in contracts with facilities in Ohio and Hawaii, 2008) and Cintas (\$207,000 in contracts with facilities in Los Angeles, Maryland, Texas, and New York)

Factory investigated: Alamode (Siguatepeque, Honduras)

Despite some improvements since July 2008, these issues remain:

- **Health and safety** measures need to be improved; **verbal harassment** remains a problem; and workers still feel **pressure to work overtime** hours that should be voluntary.
- Strong evidence that Alamode has required workers to undergo **annual pregnancy tests** and failed to acknowledge this worker rights violation.

Brand: Propper International (\$5.4 million in contracts with facilities in Puerto Rico, 2008)

Factory investigated: Suprema Manufacturing (San Pedro de Macorís, Dominican Republic)

- **Poverty wages.** The base wage only pays one-quarter the cost of basic necessities for a family of three.
- **Excessive production quotas.** Workers work through breaks, refrain from going to the bathroom, and come to work sick to meet production goals and earn sorely needed production bonuses.
- **Unhealthy work environment.** Workers are concerned that suffocating heat in the summer and air thick with fabric dust is detrimental to their health.
- **No voice on the job.** Workers interviewed were afraid that complaining too much or joining the union would get them fired. One worker was fired shortly after participating in our interview and believes that her firing was an illegal action of retaliation because of her support for the union.

Brand: Armor Holdings (subsidiary of BAE)

Factory investigated: Safariland (Tijuana, Mexico)

- **Unpaid mandatory overtime.** 16 workers reported mandatory day-shift overtime of 2.5 hours daily for which they were not paid the overtime rate of pay; 3 workers reported mandatory night-shift overtime of 4.5 hours nightly for which they were not paid the overtime rate pay.
- Most workers interviewed worked with either **no formal work contracts or extended temporary work contracts.**

- **Mandatory pregnancy tests.** Women testified being forced to submit a pregnancy test in order to be hired. Those pregnant would not be hired.
- **Pressure and intimidation.** Many workers reported supervisors pressuring them to work faster, yelling at them, and sometimes sitting beside them for extended periods and harassing them if they did not attain production quotas.
- **Dangerous conditions.** Many workers reported accidents that resulted in puncturing and even losing fingers. Most workers interviewed also expressed concern regarding dangerous substances including Resistol glue.

Brand: Rocky Brands (\$9 million in contracts with facility in Ohio)

Factory investigated: Genfort Shoes (Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province, China)

- **Child labor.** Many workers testify that children as young as 14-15 years old work the same hours as adult workers and are instructed to hide when customers inspect the factory.
- **No rest days.** Sometimes there are no days off for an entire month during peak production periods. The law requires at least one rest day per week.
- **Excessive mandatory overtime.** Workers report as many as 100 overtime hours per month—far in excess of the 36 hour legal limit.
- **Inadequate compensation for weekend work.** Pay slips show workers are paid at time and a half rather than the legally mandated double hourly rate for daytime work on weekends.
- **Crowded dorms.** Workers live 12 people to a room of only 18 square meters (less than 200 square feet) with 10 cold showers for a hallway with rooms housing 264 workers.
- **Pollution.** Workers describe the factory as discharging effluent directly into the river adjacent to the factory. The water is black and foul smelling.